

'Applying the bureaucratic brakes' from the Luxemburger Wort (22 May 1999)

Caption: On 22 May 1999, the daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort publishes an article by Archduke Otto von Habsburg, outgoing MEP and President of the International Paneuropean Union, in which he deplores the obstacles to the enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs).

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 22-23.05.1999, n° 117; 152. Jg. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Bürokratische Bremsklötze", auteur:Habsburg, Otto.

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Applying the bureaucratic brakes

by Otto Habsburg

The negotiations on enlargement of the European Union are now entering a decisive stage. It has emerged from the studies concerning the candidates for accession that under many chapters things are, with few exceptions, going substantially better than had been expected at the outset. And while fairly tough problems will now have to be addressed in some areas, it should be possible to clear these within the available time. That at least is the view taken by the European Commission experts charged with the negotiations.

The opponents of enlargement are doing what they can to create obstacles, no longer in the hope of preventing the decisive step being taken but rather with a view to putting off the fateful day. The latest attempt in this direction is the demand not to proceed with the overall negotiations until discussion has been completed under each of the various chapters, of which there are very many. Of course it would make sense for the various completed chapters to be discussed one after the other and this would appear all the more valid insofar as a whole series of them have already been settled. Looking at the matter from this point of view, it seems clear that forces are at work which will do whatever they can to postpone enlargement of the European Union. At the same time there can be little doubt that those negative forces realise they can no longer prevent enlargement. They do, however, wish to cut out certain individual states and leave others waiting until at least beyond 2002.

At the same time it is clear to all involved that the candidate countries, and in particular the so-called first-wave nations — Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia and Estonia — are ready for accession. It could even be said that they are, in certain areas, better prepared than states that already form part of the Union. Time and again, arguments which play on envy are brought to bear. The point is made repeatedly that the subsidies enjoyed by the Mediterranean countries, which receive a not insignificant proportion of European Union support funds, will be cut back if other states join. And yet it is clear that the payments to the Mediterranean states will, sooner or later, and moreover fortunately, be phased out, for the simple reason that the countries concerned have already progressed to such an extent that they no longer need aid on the same scale as previously.

It is strange what kind of arguments come to the fore. There is talk of the Russian menace, but only in the sense that everything must be done to keep Moscow happy, Moscow which is opposed to enlargement, even if there are no longer any official statements to this effect. This is clearly to disregard the lesson learnt during the Hitler period that a tyrant has never been assuaged by efforts to meet him halfway or even by giving him money. Quite the contrary in fact: the overlord just gets more aggressive and racks up his demands. This is indeed already happening in the negotiations with Russia, particularly now that, in response to an erroneous assessment of the situation, the very reserves of the International Monetary Fund have been drawn on so as to offer up to Russia the most enormous sums in history, at our taxpayers' expense.

And yet it ought to have been recognised long ago that a country's progress depends above all on its inhabitants. Of course, where a population is in a particularly difficult situation it needs support and should receive it. But money cannot make up for an unwillingness to get down to work. Again, an economy cannot be built without an infrastructure. That is, however, what is being attempted time and again; this is fundamentally wrong. Money poured into an area in which there is no infrastructure inevitably goes to waste. It is high time to return to some straightforward national economic principles, rather than dealing in ideological fantasies, in which Russia in the imaginings of certain influential people is acquiring the status of Mecca or Rome.

Clearly, the heavy burden on the European Union is a major influencing factor. It is, admittedly, argued that such are the policies pursued by the socialists, but that is a misrepresentation. There are of course socialists who pursue such policies, in the western part of Europe in particular. It should not, however, be forgotten that the danger facing us is sometimes perceived more clearly by social-democrats in Central and Eastern Europe than by those who in the West engage in politics under the same banner.

It should always be borne in mind that enlargement of the Union is important not only economically but also politically and from a security viewpoint. It must above all be understood that the further the frontiers of freedom are pushed back to the East, the safer the West and the Centre become. This point does not, however, seem to be grasped by the bureaucrats and technocrats who, in league with certain politically motivated circles, are doing everything they can to delay enlargement. That in doing so they are doing enormous damage to their own populations is something which unfortunately will take some time to become clear, just as it was not realised until the outbreak of hostilities in the Second World War that the so-called appeasers were no true friends of peace and indeed that they undoubtedly did much to ensure that Hitler's war was far bloodier and longer-lasting than would have been the case without their policies.